

A Neighborhood Study: Recreational Parks and Parent Stress

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Introduction

Parenting stress can impede a parent's ability to care for their children in positive ways.^{1, 2, 3, 4}

Neighborhoods and environments in which families operate have a profound influence on parenting and play a large role in parent support and resources.^{2, 5, 6}

Stress levels of individuals are influenced by both social environment and built environment aspects of their neighborhoods.^{2, 7, 8}



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Most recently, literature has focused almost exclusively on negative aspects of communities and their relation to parenting concerns. For example, neighborhood rates of poverty are cited as detrimental to parenting.^{6, 9, 10}

The current study seeks to investigate a potential protective factor within communities, namely proximity to a recreational park.

Research Question:
Does living within walking distance of a recreational park reduce parenting stress?

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Methods

Sample: 1,326 parents of young children in 6 WIC clinics and 4 childcare centers in Franklin County, Ohio

Tool:
➤ Anonymous survey
➤ Collected demographic information and general neighborhood location information
➤ Indicator information on child maltreatment behaviors, parent stress, social support, economic hardship, neighborhood climate, social service program awareness, and depression derived from subscales of the "Ecological Assessment Tool" (Maguire-Jack, 2014)

Dependent variable: parent stress
➤ 25-item subscale measured on a 4-point Likert scale

Key independent variable: distance to a park
➤ Self-reported street intersection nearest to home from nearest park address reported on the Columbus Recreation and Parks website as well as the Metro Parks website
➤ Dichotomized creating two groups: those in the 10th percentile for distance or within .25 miles from a park; those lying outside of the 10th percentile range or further than .25 miles from a park

Other independent variables: parent race, age, marital status, education level, economic hardship, household size, depression, and social support

Analysis:
Ordinary least squares regression on parent stress and the dichotomous measure of distance, controlling for covariates

Results

Table 1. Regression Results

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients	
	B	Std. Error
Close Proximity (within .25 mi) to Recreational Park	-.10*	.04
Single	-.04	.03
Economic Hardship Scale	.00	.01
Depression Scale	.18*	.03
Age	.00	.00
More than High School	-.09*	.02
White	-.05*	.03
Social Support Scale	-.13*	.03
Household size	.01	.01
*p<.05 N=829		

Results continued

➤ Close proximity (within .25 mi) to a recreational park was associated with decreased parent stress, and participants living within walking distance (.25 mi) were more likely to report lower parent stress
➤ Strong social support, education past the high school level, and identifying racially as white were all related to decreased parent stress
➤ Those who reported decreased levels of depression were more likely to report decreased levels of parent stress

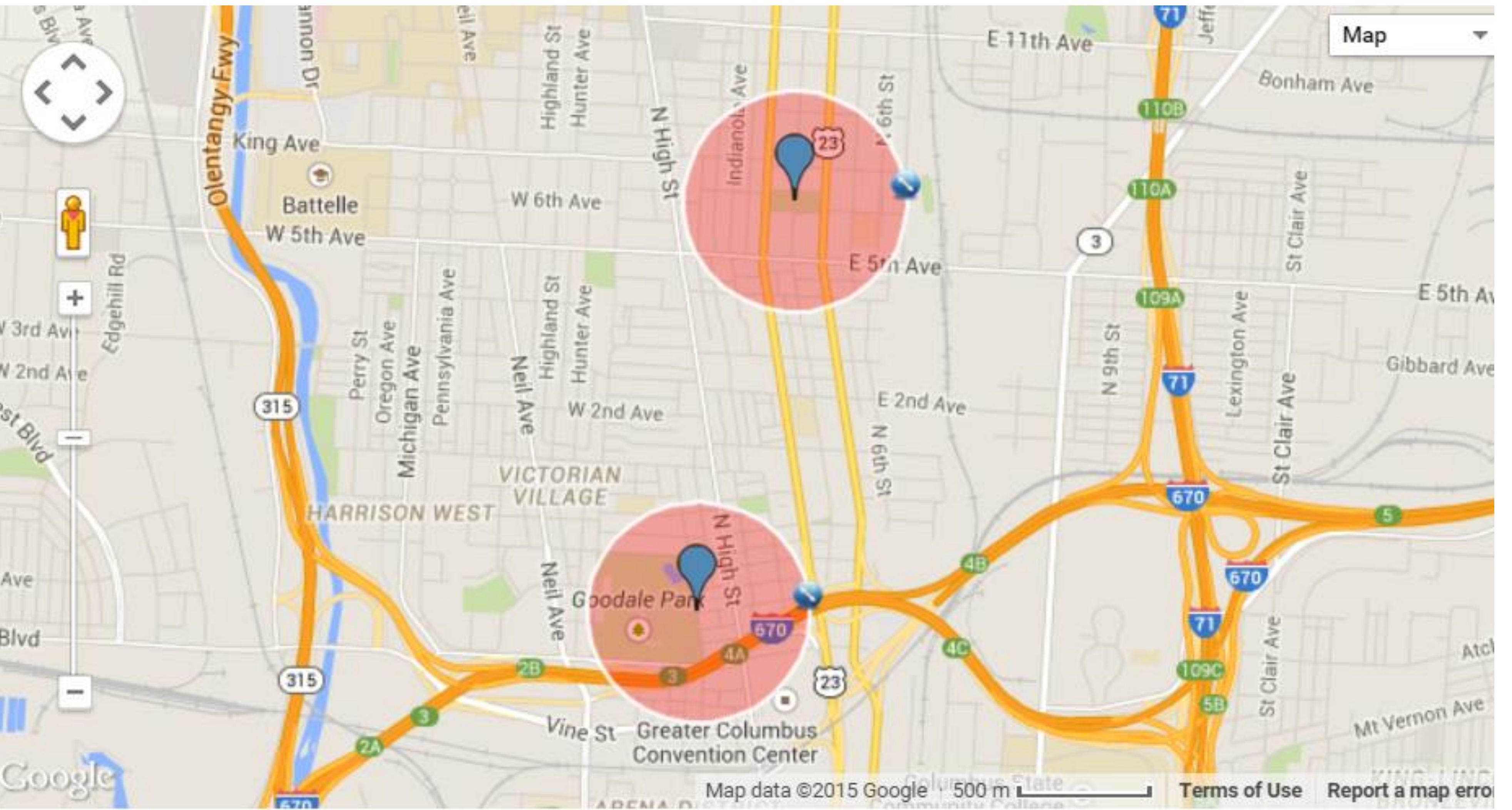


Figure 3: Radii of residences within .25 mi of two Columbus park addresses
Source: Google Maps image of Columbus, OH

Implications

Significance of Findings
➤ Findings indicate that living within walking distance, or .25 miles from a park serves as a protective factor for parent stress
➤ This research provided a protective factor for parent stress that was a positive aspect of a community that was available for everyone to use

Conclusions
➤ Proposes the importance of collaborations between social workers and urban and community developers to consider how neighborhood structures can affect social outcomes such as decreased stress of parents in the area
➤ Suggests the growth of a new area of research of primary prevention for child maltreatment, obesity and child behavioral issues, among others using parks

Future Aims
➤ Further examination of park amenities, size or quality and associations with potential reduced parent stress
➤ Assessment of actual park use of parents and families and the association with parent stress

